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## A GERMAN VIEW OF THE PARIS SALON.

BY EUGEN VON JAGOW.

MY readers know well enough what the Paris Salon is, which every Spring is held in the Palace of Industry, presenting many thousands of paintings, engravings, and sculptures. The exhibition is international; the selection of the works depends upon the judgment of a committee of forty of the most celebrated artists, who are not necessarily, because of their celebrity, the best judges. At all events, this mode of selection has many objectionable features, of which I will present only two. The most obvious is that these judges, however just they may be, have still the natural human tendency to prefer the artists who belong to their own school. So much the worse for an original spirit who does not belong to either of the ruling schools: he will simply not be admitted. Then by this examination of thousands upon thousands of works, comprising countless daubs and mere academic performances devoid of artistic quality, the committee become so wearied and dispirited that admission is finally largely a question of chance. One good result, however, of this perhaps unavoidable evil is that these elements, being brought together, at least are open to judgment, and to that extent do no mischief.

But these are trifles, which, like the display of fashion to which the Salon gives opportunity, need not greatly concern us. It is easily understood that the numerous ladies who think

only of an exhibition of their toilets, and that all the gentlemen who pay court to these society lions of the Faubourg St. Germain, to the very rich, to the beauties of the stage and to another class of beauties besides, only serve to increase the mass of people lacking judgment.

Most visitors to the Salon, catalogue in hand, seek only the works bearing famous names. One can readily understand that the mischief of this is that it is to-day exceedingly difficult for an artist in Paris without influential connections to become known through his mere talent: Corot, Delacroix, Millet and numerous others, now celebrated painters, were for a long time—the most of them all their lives—on the verge of starvation, and if one at the present time, when business prostration presses severely upon art, pays little attention to these facts, it is simply because he usually first notices the great masters after their death, and that by starvation.

It occasionally happens that so-called great masters have already become forgotten while they still live, which is perhaps more unpleasant to them than never to have been recognized at all. Formerly people went mad over Meissonnier with his duodecimo pictures. Meissonnier and Ingres are forgotten by the great public, and the gods of the day (of whom some may probably count upon an immortality of ten years) bear the following names: Cabanel,

Bougereau, Roll, Carolus Duran, Cormon, Puvis de Chavannes, Henner, Chaplin, etc.

Before we interest ourselves with separate pictures and examples, we will glance over the present Salon.

In the too-hastily written reviews of the Paris press one finds almost every year the cheap cry: This Salon is like the last! But could it be otherwise, or much more, can this year's really contrast with the last? If it be true that the Salon gives a faithful picture of the condition of French art, since this develops only slowly and steadily, so the Salon can differ from its predecessor but a little. It is the task of the diligent observer, however, to sympathetically detect this little, and out of it to trace the development of certain artistic tendencies.

The line of demarcation becomes even more sharply drawn between the two schools, which it is the fashion to describe, the one as idealistic, academic; the other as realistic, impressionist, naturalistic, although they each furnish many gradations. Quite the same thing may be observed in the realm of literature, which was perhaps never so closely connected with the pictorial arts, and which has been not a little assisted by the recent illustration of celebrated poetical works.

The more these roads divide the more one discovers with a certain disgust a vacuum lying between them, which he cannot place in his account. Upon the one side allegories, mythological forms and paintings half a kilometer long; upon the other a perverse naturalism which delights in the Hideous as the romance of Victor Hugo did in the Horrible.

As concerns the first tendency we

become from day to day more skeptical. Involuntarily "Lurlei" comes to my mind, a romance of Julius Wolff, in which the Baron von Grotthuss well says: "The powers of the Rhine, the phantom Nixe, who in the light of the moon appears and sinks again, singing magical songs—the phantasy of our nature grasps after this elusive, shadowy being, not towards the pretentious Lorelei filling a great frame with foster-parents, brothers, and a whole train of lovers."

The above-mentioned vacuum between the two schools is unfortunately imperfectly represented in the Salon. Yet if the quantity be small, this little is so much the more important. It is a healthy realism, genre scenes taken from life without being objectionable or sensual, speaking landscapes, etc.

It would perhaps be not uninteresting to classify all the art-works—or, to express it more modestly, all the works of the Salon—according to these points of view. But since their number reaches into the thousands we have not space for such a division, and I must confine myself to describing in the briefest manner several of the most celebrated paintings; as to the statuary, little interest is taken in it in Paris.

In the first place I pay homage to my countrymen. They have learned much of the French, whose technique in so many respects is superior to ours, without disowning their own artistic origin. Uhde's "Evening Meal," Stremel's "Recitation," Habermann's "Clinic," Schildknecht's "Thunderstorm," Olde's "Seashore," Schmidt's "Students," "By the Fireside," by Dora Hitz, and a magnificent etching by Köppins deserve the greatest praise, which the French

press has given them—no small thing for Germans.

I will draw nearer one of the German pictures. It seems to me especially worthy of notice,—“The Dutch Orphans,” the work of the talented Munich artist, Gotthard Kühl. The French press, including the *Siecle*, the *Evénement*, the *Echo de Paris*, and others, has praised it and the not less charming “Voiliers.” The latter journal, in which, as is well known, Daudet’s celebrated “Sappho” appeared, thus speaks: “Herr Kühl is one of those foreign artists who have had the quickest artistic success among us; his pictures always show a personal individuality; excellent chiaro-oscuro and admirable execution! ‘Voiliers’ and ‘Orphelines’ possess all the qualities which have made him so renowned.” One rejoices all the more to find such unbiased and correct criticisms in France.

Whoever has been in a Dutch Orphan Asylum, an interior of which our picture reproduces to the life, understands at a glance the touching situation. To the left a child consecrated to the Church reaches to the other children some milk, which is poured out by two women on the right. How beautifully they are grouped at the long table! —as if the painter had renewed Leonardo da Vinci’s famous “Evening Meal,” and even excelled his portrayal of childish naïveté. The little orphan maids in their red frocks, sitting only at one side of the table, are almost full-face to the spectator. But that is in accordance with the laws of realism that they should find in the tinted wall, with its undecorative pictures, a comfortable support for their backs. The little maiden, standing in the background

of the picture with open mouth, comically angry at some mischance that has befallen her, looking over to the other side of the table, where her companions with inimitable chiaro-oscuro hold their empty tin-cups in their hands, gives the whole picture a characteristic naïve stamp. All this is painted with a few strokes, but these few strokes reveal the master. What fine observation of the actual this shows, how each of these children’s heads has its own individual character, and with what art are treated the sunbeams falling slanting through the window!

But enough of German painters! Among the French painters, at least in his own way, Jules Breton takes the first rank. His “End of the Day” and “End of Work” have the same characteristics, an open field, peasant women not sicklied o’er with the pale cast of urban civilization, the quiet charm of nature sinking to slumber. There is no trace of sentimentality or mannerism. It is true to life and in the best sense of the word genuinely realistic. The “Evening,” by Duez, is not unworthy of comparison with these two pictures. Rochefort, whose artistic judgment is far better than his political, pronounces upon these as follows: “If I had a grand medal to award I would give it to Duez, whose ‘Evening’ is by all odds his best picture.” Three cows, one reposing on the beautiful green grass of Normandy, have given themselves up to rumination by the gray, shimmering sea. A rayless sun sets like a ball of fire through the thick mist of twilight. Every one can appreciate the truth of this picture from the deep and lasting impression which it leaves.

Brispot, Dagnan-Bouveret, Warrener,

Geoffroy, Guillemet, and many more, contribute genre and landscape pictures which do honor to the Salon, but space fails for description.

There is no lack of portraits, nor unfortunately of pictures of groups, whose only merit is that they present this or that Parisian celebrity with the accuracy of a photograph. This comports with modern literary tendencies. Molière's figures are types, the modern are individuals only, by dozens, which the poet flatters himself he portrays from life. Rembrandt, Rubens, Titian, Velasquez, however they differ from each other, all paint character-heads, types. To-day one is content when it can be said of a picture or a bust of Boulanger, "It is just like him, as like as a photograph."

Among the good or better portraits are Henner's Kreolin with abundant hair, Louise Abbema's portrait of her father, and above all Bonnat's Alexander Dumas. In this there is nothing flattered; the features of the poet are powerfully delineated.

Greatly to be regretted, as before said, are the groups of portraits, especially, when in line with a sickly tendency of the day, they portray the operations of the clinic and the hospital. Zola describes the most disgusting diseases; Claretié devotes a romance to Hypnotism; Sarah Bernhardt studies the death-struggle in a hospital—what wonder that the painters picture for us Charcot in the Salpêtrière and M. Pasteur with his hydrophobic patients and his inoculation and exact of us a medical course! Rembrandt indeed shows us a portion of a dead man, but how differently is the scene treated by him, and what a different impression it must make upon the public to whom these representa-

tions must appear extraordinary and uncomfortable. What Lessing says in his parallel between Shakespeare's Ghost in "Hamlet" and Voltaire's in "Semiramis" is equally applicable to the above-named pictures. Broillet's Charcot and Gervex's Dr. Péan chill our hearts.

I must praise Dantan's "Moulage du Modèle," which group belongs to the confined life of the sculptor's studio, but is full of humor and illustrates the old saying in its own droll way that it is more prosaic behind the curtain than upon the boards.

Particularly charming is Carolus Duran's "Andromeda," a nude woman leaning against the rocky wall of a dusky grotto, and whose high light is strengthened by the emerald green water in the background.

Quite remarkable is Henner's "Hérodiade," which, in its composition, leans towards the academic tendency. An innocent-looking damsel, apparently scarcely fifteen years old, who, according to the tradition, bears upon a plate a bloody head, is a contradiction. Without the hideous accompaniment, it might be entitled "The Sistine Madonna," of which the beautiful little lass in attitude and expression reminds one.

With Puvis de Chavannes, Flameng, Cormon,—who in many respects recalls David,—and with Cabanel, we find ourselves in the full idealistic, academic stream. Perhaps only one of them—the first named—succeeds in reproducing the past. As a colorist he is a master, who stands much higher, for example, than Makart. His method of composition is highly poetic, individual but confused, and his numerous pupils who imitate him suc-

ceed for the most part in acquiring only his faults, so that he might say to them : " Ihr gleicht dem Geist, den Ihr begreift, nicht mir."

It is apparent that the followers of the academic school conceive *à priori*, directing their gaze inward, unconcerned as to the model which nature furnishes. If one is not a genius like Puvis de Chavannes, whose wonderful art triumphs over the weaknesses of his manner, this method of production results in dreadful miscarriages. One finds in the Salon, pictures in which the imagination gropes blindly, seeking in vain any artistic unity, any artistic measure.

Puvis de Chavannes presents in this year's Salon allegorical cartoons destined for the new Sorbonne ; also Fla-

meng. What do we care for these allegorical figures and groups which depict the wisdom, philosophy, and history of that celebrated Parisian University !

Cormon's "Victors of Salamis," with its thousands of half-nude Greek women, gorgeously costumed warriors, and the whole conventional paraphernalia of laurel branches and similar things, is pure phantasy—I may say purely theatrical. Returning warriors look quite otherwise. One admires, as in Cabanel's "Cleopatra," who apathetically tries poisons on slaves brought before her, the beautiful groups, rich coloring, rainbow splendor of costumes and carpets, but incident and figures fail to move us.

"Less art and more truth!" we exclaim.

